

(gentle music)

- Let the congregation be seated. Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by (congregation chants indistinctly) God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (congregation chants indistinctly) Let us offer unto God our unison prayer. Forbid oh God, that we should forget, amid our earthly comforts, the pains and mortal anguish that our Lord Jesus endured for our salvation. Grant us this day a true vision of all that he suffered in his betrayal, his lonely agony, his false trial, his mocking and scourging, and the torture of death up on the cross. As thou has given thyself utterly for us, may we give ourselves entirely to thee, oh Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior Amen. The hymn is 435. (uplifting music) (congregation singing a hymn) Let us pray, Almighty and everlasting God, slow to anger and of great mercy. Hear the prayer in which thy son has made on our behalf. That we may be forgiven our sins and that we like him, may ask thee to forgive those who have wronged us through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Here are the words of the gospel according to St. Luke, the 23rd chapter, at the 26 verse. "And as they led Jesus away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene who was coming in from the country and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus. And that followed him a great multitude of the people and the women who be wailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if they do these when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Two others also who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals one on the right, and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." " Amen. (congregation sings a hymn) (uplifting music)

- Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And the words of an old emphony, a favorite Negro spiritual, "If you cannot preach like Peter and I cannot, if you cannot pray like Paul and I again, cannot. You can tell the love of Jesus and I can and say he died for all." And so today on this Good Friday, I shall tell the lot of he who died to make the wounded heal, and to heal the sin-sick soul, to help us use that balm in Gilead. When Christ hung on that cross on that Friday, long ago in Cavalry, his heart was not filled with hate and retribution for he loved us. Gazing upon his crucifiers, his voice was heard saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And on that Thursday a year ago, when Martin Luther king Jr, bearing the cross of non-violence, and met this, watch himself so brutally assassinated I believe that had his voice lasted a few minutes longer. He too would asked, "Father forgive give them, for they know not what they do." I believe that Jesus did enter his kingdom where he went to prepare way for us, for you and me. I believe that King is sitting there in paradise today competent by the fact that he at least tried to bring lightness but hurt because there's still darkness. Because he tried to bring help, but hurt because there's even more despair. Because he tried to find peace, and yet we have more violence. I believe however, that they both are interceding with our father today. For his guidance and direction of all of us here on earth, in these our dark

hours. But we are beset back problems made by man. But fortunately by problems which can be resolved, by men who put their hands in God's hands and try a little harder, just inching along to forgive those who err, or who lose sight of the main stream. To have compassion for them. And to try to understand better all of their fellow men. We're in God's land, we are all brothers. It is not enough however, just to forgive. Each of us in our own way must try both to forgive and to provide help for the wandering lambs among us. We must forgive, for example, those who have us now in Vietnam, and we must with that forgiveness, help them to help us get out. We must forgive those who have committed such great errors, as those who denied five barley loaves and two small fishes to those who are hungry. And are denying minimum wages to those who tore slave laborers. As do many employed in the kitchens of our state's institutions today. And what that forgiveness help them to ensure sufficient incomes for all. So we can relieve from this line, "Those who suffer in poverty, despite the abundance of wealth." We must forgive those who in seeking to realize their rights and privileges which are just theirs, utilize techniques which are not just theirs. Such as the occupation of buildings, techniques which in the short and long run are more calculated in fact, to thrust us back to a second post-reconstruction period. And so forgiving them however, we must help to make real the kinds of conditions which will not ferment rights and destruction, but will help us realize the good life for all despite race, color, or creed. We must forgive those who respond to such destructive or potentially destructive acts by passing or urging the passage of laws calculated only to further destroy and divide us. Such as instead of restricting the occupancy of a park in our own city to 50 individuals at any one time. And we must help them to understand that Jesus himself, that on the cross, in order to give us time to realize the kind of life and society, which the Father desires for us all. Therefore, we ask again today for Jesus and yes, the King to continue to intercede for us, asking the father to forgive us for we know not what we do. But we hope that each and every one of us throughout the land, EA, throughout the world, will try to forgive and to help, with hearts filled with compassion and patience, with minds filled with knowledge and understanding. So that we may become more worthy of the Father's forgiveness. So that we may truly use generously that balm in Gilead and make the wounded healed, and heal our sin-sick souls. Let us pray. Dear God, on this day when thy son asked thee to forgive those who knew not what they do. And on this day when and one year ago, Martin Luther king was removed from our midst. We ask thee once again, to continue to forgive us for all of our sins and transgressions. And to help us put our hands in your hands so that we may truly do what is right and what is just. So that before long, we can all walk the valley in peace free to blast and bound to each other as thy children. Father forgive us we beseech thee and help us do as we should. So that we will have less and less occasion to ask thee to forgive us, and more occasion to rejoice that we are truly thy children walking in the ways which you have set forth for us. Your children for whom you sacrificed your son on that cross in Cavalry, long, long ago. And who forgave us then as we hope you will forgive us now. Amen. (uplifting music)

- Let us unite in prayer. Eternal God, our Father who did send thy son to be the savior of the world. We wait before thee quietly in the shadows of the cross, where he made the Supreme sacrifice that our wayward humanity might find its way back to life. We confess, oh Lord, that the sins which killed him, often beseech, and beseech our own hearts. We see ourselves in the very company around him on Golgotha. We know the mood of fear, of jealousy, of hatred, and of doubt, of those who condemned to die suffered beside him on their crosses. Search us, we ask oh God, and reveal to us our evil ways. That in full surrender to thee and thy will, we may be cleansed of all that corrupts our life, and separates us from thee, and from our brothers.

Forbid we ask our Father, that on this day of his great agony, we should join the mob that watched him there in morbid humor and pagan cruelty. Deliver us from the passive curiosity that waits a sign, and the hypocrisy which joins the crowd to hide its emptiness. May thy spirit find us today where we really are. In our human frailty, our lagging loyalty, and our lack of faith. Before thy son's cross, oh God, we ask that thou wouldst forgive us our reluctance to take thee at thy word. We confess with sorrow that we have shut life out through fear and timidity. We have been afraid of vitality, and we have sought the safety of the ordinary. We have been happier with acquaintances than with friends, with repetition than with new victories, with increase of reputation than with renewal of character. Forgive us our failure to accept life through growth and struggle. We confess, oh Lord, above all that our sins have made us incapable of welcoming the good news that is a part of this Good Friday and Easter morn. Selfishness has turned the open hand into the clenched fist in thee, and pride have shut us out of genuine friendship. Forgive us our Father for clinging to these impoverishing sins. And encourage us anew to desire the life that is life indeed. Oh God of ancient prophets and holy martyrs, pour out thy spirit upon us in this Good Friday we ask, that once again in the hour of our need, we may dream dreams and see visions of prophets and of Christ. Drop the plumb line of thy justice beside every wall that we have built. Way in the balances of thy truth, all the accomplishments of our skill and science. Test with thy consuming fire the permanent worth of our industry and our art. If the earth be shaken and the foundations tremble, grant us courage to look beyond the ruins to that which has not fallen we ask. If judgment falls as it fell on Good Friday, and the hollow vanity of much that pass for the substance of our life is revealed as nothing steadious until we lift up our eyes unto thee. And know that our hope is in thee both now and forever. The name of him who was steadfast against death and sin, whose sacrifice for mankind we commemorate this day, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Our scripture reading is from Luke 23, verses 39 to 45. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, "If thou be Christ save thyself and us." But the other answering rebuked him saying, "Dost not thou fear of God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." And he said unto Jesus, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise." And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst." (congregation singing)
(uplifting music)

- Christ's first word on the cross, was a prayer for his enemies. The second word in contrast, was an answer to a prayer, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise." As we look at this, it evokes a number of questions. What is paradise? What did Christ mean by paradise? Is paradise merely being with Christ? Is it having fellowshiped with Christ fellowship with Christians? What is the real meaning of death? Was Christ death as the disciples tended to believe the end of Christ's kingdom? Why did the one thief and not the other ask Jesus to remember him? Was this reaction of Dismas, the malefactor on the cross, merely a form of so-called foxhole Christianity? Is this reaction due to the fact that he shared with Christ, this experience of dying? This highly emotional experience. Does this deathbed type of repentance give emphasis to the fact that it is never too late to repent? And that in effect there is no reward for good living? What then are some of the implications of Christ's second word on the cross? In the brief time for our meditation, it would not be feasible to attempt to answer these questions nor perhaps are the answers to some of them. On the other hand, I should like to focus intention on the significance of the act, which Christ

performed through this his second word. An act of love, indeed an act of mercy. An act which particularly emphasizes the concept of Christianity, which says we get to have not because we are good, but because God is good. During this second time, Christ speaks from the cross several notes where the elements are apparent and significant. Unrestrained mercy, to be able to show mercy and love at the time of one's death is indeed the mark of a true Christian. There was an instance sometime ago, a potential air crash where all aboard were expecting to die in a plane that had apparently gone out of control, and it was plummeting towards earth. In the midst of this catastrophic event, many people were caught in fear and panic. However, one of the passengers moved among the others and helped and comforted those who were most fearful. At the last minute, the pilot was able to save the plane, thereby enabling this act of mercy to be recorded for posterity. An act of mercy, which indeed exemplifies the Christian act, which Christ presented to us on the cross. Indeed, the quality of mercy is not strained. The real Christian in emulating Christ does not allow circumstances to dictate his acts of mercy. Our caring for others results in the kind of concern that has us say, Lord lay some soul upon my heart and love that soul through me. And may I bravely do my part to win that soul for thee. The fact that Christ gave us this example of showing mercy, even at the time of his own death, reaffirms our faith in the power of his love and provides for us the shining example of true Christian mercy. A type of mercy which is not dependent upon or dictated by time, place, or circumstance. In a sense, a freedom of mercy, or if you will, a freedom to be merciful. This kind of unselfish service and concern for others knows no bounds. It is inherent in our concern for the social ills of today's society, for the disease ridden, the underprivileged, the poverty stricken, and the oppressed throughout this country and throughout the world. Far reaching changes in social and individual attitudes have always attended pity. Pity arouses sympathy and wakes our imagination. There was pity at the foot of the cross, and there was pity on the cross. The cross began its saving mission through pity and mercy shown to a dying thief. Another significant element in Christ's second word was that of immediate reaction and authority. There was no red tape, there were no forms to fill out, there were no conferences to be held. The thief asked a question and Christ answered immediately and authoritatively. Christ in his humility was willing to confront and communicate with this man of ill repute. He was not concerned whether this man was a fierce, brutal individual who may have had nothing but contempt for justice and righteousness. Undoubtedly, this thief was moved by the reaction of the crowd, as well as the reaction in the words which Christ spoke. Nevertheless, there must have been a definite relation between the words of Christ, and the transformation brought about in this outlaw's heart. Robert Browning in "The Ring and the Book" tells of a pitch dark night in Naples, when the night's black was burst through by a blaze. One flash of lightning reveals the surrounding mountains. The city thick with spires, the sea white as a ghost. So says the poet, "Truth may be flashed out by one blow. And in that instant, the despairing soul may see and be saved." Thus it was with the thief on the cross. Who only a short time earlier, had joined in the curses that were being heaped upon Christ. In these brief moments on the cross, the malefactor perhaps began to understand even better than the disciples what Christ really meant. Since he believed that Jesus did have a kingdom beyond the grave. The third element of concern in Christ's second word was that of true repentance. It was a clear vision of the inner meaning of Christ's cross that wrote within this criminal, a broken and a contrite heart. The realization that his own sin was a part of the burden that Christ had to bear. Thus, he becomes Jesus's defender. As he speaks to his companion and crying, "Dost not thou fear of God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." Here is the plain evidence of true repentance. Whereas the other thief was only concerned

with escaping the penalty of his wrongdoing, the penitent thief was aware of receiving the due rewards of his deeds. Indeed, he was in the process of being born again. Speaking in Westminster Abbey, Dr. Ingram, Bishop of London, gave emphasis to this truth when he said the cross belongs to eternity rather than to time. And with awful significance stretches with easy and terrible reach. Not only to the last moment that you'll pass on earth, but back to the earliest dawn of the foundation of the world. The apostle Paul perceived this truth when in 2 Corinthians 5, he says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." This divine purpose was fully revealed in the conversion of the penitent thief. The fourth element of truth in these words of Christ gives evidence of courage, confidence, the type of unwavering faith, which the true Christian has exhibited throughout the ages. This is exemplified by the fact that not only was the thief on the cross assured of forgiveness, but he was promised reunion with the savior on the other side of death. This promise given with divine authority, certainly must have altered the thief's feeling about death inspired courage and confidence, and finally quieted his fears. Finally, the second words of Christ provide us with an understanding of the real Christian mission. They started the mission of salvation. As Christ returned to God, he bore with him the soul of the penitent thief. The first fruits of his mission to redeem the world. The cross began its saving mission with a thief. "Today thou shall be with me in paradise." This final echo from the cross is our challenge and our obligation. Our challenge to take up our cross and follow him. Our cross of sacrifice, our cross of giving of ourselves, our cross of Christian mercy. May we joined with the poet as he says, "But drops of grief can never repay the debt of love I owe." Here Lord, I give myself away, which is all that I can do. Let us pray. Lord lead us to thee in paradise through thy grace and mercy. Enable us to emulate the example of thy love that knows no bounds of time, place, or circumstance. And open our minds and hearts to accept this greatest of gifts, which began with the thief on the cross, salvation. Amen.
(uplifting music) (congregation sings a hymn)

- The Lord be with you. (congregation chants) Let us pray. Infinite and eternal spirit, our God and father. Author of all good and never far from any of thy children. We draw near to thee that in fellowship with thee we may receive of thy spirit. May all the bonds of love and ties of friendship be made stronger through him who in his mortal agony was not unmindful that we need one another's love, even the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh eternal God, who alone makest men to be of one mind in a house. Help us, the members of this household, faithfully to fulfill our duties to thee and to each other. Put away from us unkind thoughts, anger, and evil speaking. Give us hearts of compassion, full of affection and sympathy toward all persons. Grant us the grace to feel the sorrows and trials of others as our own. And to bear patiently with their and our imperfections. Preserve us from selfishness, and grant that living daily, we may walk in love and grow up into the likeness of thy son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

- Our scripture is from the gospel according to John chapter 19 verses 25 through 27, "But standing by the cross of Jesus, where his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home.